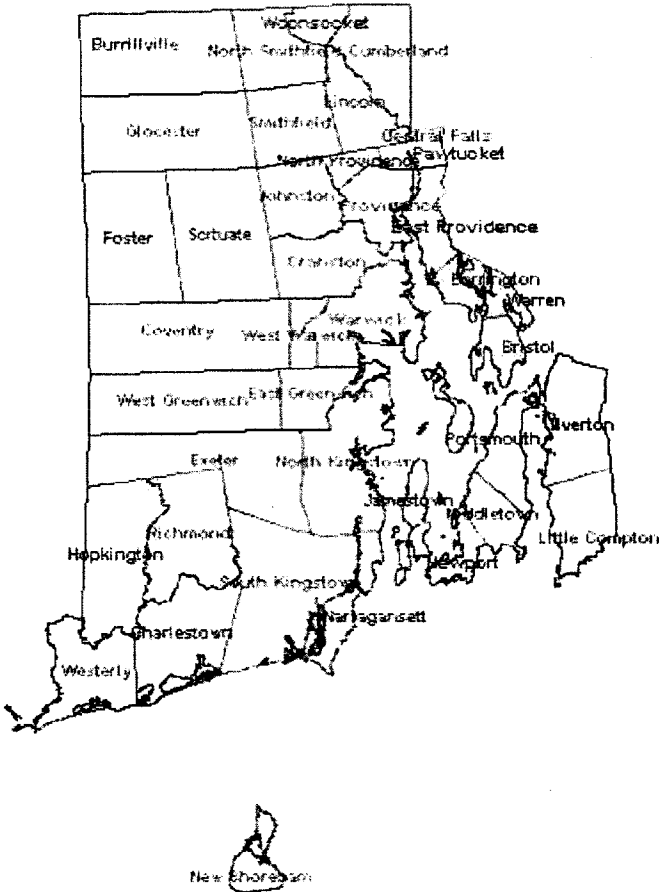


# A Victim Survey on the Effects of a Court-Mandated Batterer Intervention Program in Rhode Island

**April 21, 2003**



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## **Preface**

The Rhode Island Justice Commission provided grant funds to the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence and its member agency, the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties, to interview victims of intimate partner and family violence whose assailants had been sanctioned to participate in a batterer intervention program.

BOTEC Analysis Corporation, under a subcontract with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, developed the survey instrument with the assistance of the Coalition and the Batterers' Intervention Program Standards Oversight Committee, provided oversight to the survey process, and interpreted the results. The purpose of the grant was to explore the feasibility of using victim surveys as an adjunct method of evaluating the value of batterer intervention programs. The current method of evaluation is restricted to examining batterer intervention programs in terms of adherence to state-wide program standards.

The grant funded an innovative approach to how state coalitions against domestic violence can measure the value of batterer intervention programs and provide victim-based suggestions for improvement. Developing innovations requires the cooperation of self-confident and dedicated staff. Among those who displayed these characteristics are: Sisan Smallman, Assistant Probation and Parole Administrator and Chairperson of the Batterers Intervention Program Standards Oversight Committee, Deb DeBare, Executive Director, Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and from the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties, Penny Walker, Director of Legal Services, Sage Bauer, Court Advocate, and Courtney Cotsonas, Court Advocate who conducted the interviews with victims.

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## **A Victim Survey in Rhode Island on the Effects of a Court-Mandated Batterer Intervention Program**

### **Executive Summary**

Rhodes Island law mandates that persons convicted of domestic violence or whose cases are filed attend a certified batterer intervention program. This study examines the feasibility of using locally administered surveys of victims, whose assailants have been sanctioned to an intervention program, as an adjunct management evaluation tool to the use of state certification standards. The interview responses of a sample of 75 such victims covered the victims' perceptions of the effects of the program, the amount of reabuse they experienced, and whether they separated from their assailant as an additional strategy to reduce the likelihood of reabuse.

The pilot survey process was successfully administered by the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties. The outcome of this local survey indicated, as expected, the administrative processes that should be improved if the survey was to become a routinely used management tool. The results also indicated the importance of identifying the new intimate partners of abusers, the need to develop methods to track victims, the importance of focusing on the frequent child witnessing of domestic violence, the need to develop programs specific to types of abuses other than male batterers of female victims, and the importance of strong sanctions against assailants who fail to attend or dropout of batterer intervention programs.

Finally, the interview data provided information that helped to define the local domestic and family abuse problem in terms of the frequency of abuse for the interviewed victims, the amount of reabuse, the involvement of children, the rate of separation of victims and assailants, and the perceptions of victims of the success of the intervention program.

## **A Victim Survey in Rhode Island on the Effects of a Court-Mandated Batterer Intervention Program**

### **The Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence in Rhode Island:**

Batterer counseling is mandated in Rhode Island for a family, household member<sup>1</sup> or other person convicted of domestic violence<sup>2</sup> or whose case is filed.<sup>3</sup> Qualified programs must be certified by the Batterers Intervention Program Standards Oversight Committee, which formulates program-operating standards.<sup>4</sup>

Rhode Island local and state police are mandated by law to arrest suspected perpetrators of domestic violence crimes when probable cause exists to believe the crime was committed.<sup>5</sup> In 2001, Rhode Island local and state police arrested 6,534 suspects for domestic violence crimes.<sup>6</sup> While the courts dismiss about 29 percent of the cases,<sup>7</sup> most of the remaining offenders were placed on probation or their cases filed and they were sanctioned to a batterer intervention program. In March 2002, 4,825 or 19 percent of all persons on probation had at least one active

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<sup>1</sup> Family or household member includes spouses, former spouses, adult persons related by blood or marriage, adult person who are presently residing together or who have resided together in the past three years, and person who have a child in common regardless of whether they have been married or have lived together, or if persons who are or have been in a substantial dating or engagement relationship within the past one year... (R.I. Gen. Laws § 12-29-2).

<sup>2</sup> Domestic violence includes, but is not limited to, any of the following crimes when committed by one family or household member against another: 1) simple assault; 2) felony assaults; 3) vandalism; 4) disorderly conduct; 5) trespass; 6) kidnapping; 7) child snatching; 8) sexual assault; 9) homicide; 10) violation of the provisions of a protective order... where the respondent has knowledge of the order and the penalty for violation thereof; and 11) stalking.

<sup>3</sup> Batterer counseling is required for persons “convicted of or placed on probation for a crime involving domestic violence or whose case is filed... where the defendant pleads *nolo contendere*, in addition to any other sentence imposed or where counseling ordered, shall be ordered by the judge to attend, at his or her own expense, appropriate to address his or her violent behavior, a program with demonstrated expertise in counseling of domestic violence offenders (R.I. Gen. Laws. §12-29-5(a)).

<sup>4</sup> The Committee has mandated that batterer intervention programs be “conducted in the context of psycho-educational groups of peers under the leadership of professional facilitators trained and experienced in such work.” Group meetings of 90 minutes each are to take place for a minimum of 20 weeks. Finally, the standards provide that “batterers intervention programs are responsible to victims and the community at large, as well as to the individual program participants. (R.I. Gen. Laws §12-29-5.1-3).

<sup>5</sup> R.I. Gen. Laws § 12-29-3(b)(1)

<sup>6</sup> Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit, Rhode Island Supreme Court.

charge related to domestic violence. Almost all of these offenders, who were overwhelmingly male, were ordered into certified batterer intervention programs.<sup>8</sup>

It is important that court responses to battering are effective; damage to women, children and other family members from abuse is serious, long lasting, and many times intergenerational. While there have been numerous evaluations of batterer intervention programs, their conclusions about effectiveness are mixed. In general, studies with randomized assignment of batterers do not detect an effect, while quasi-experimental studies usually detect positive effects. The studies suffer from a lack of uniformity. They use limited, researcher defined measures of re-abuse, and the length of offender and victim follow-up differs among the studies. Also, batterer intervention programs exhibit a great deal of variation.

Successful evaluations of a relatively few programs may provide benchmarks but little or no information about the effectiveness of any particular program. State coalitions against domestic violence, who are often charged with oversight of the batterer intervention programs, need a straightforward and economical management evaluation tool. There is a very real gap between the evaluation tools applied by researchers and the standards methods used by state coalitions. Government supported evaluations are uniformly concerned about measuring the reduction in battering that results from intervention programs, often restricted to official arrest or court reports. Public oversight programs are uniformly concerned about program inputs, such as curriculum, facilitator qualifications, and length of program, and do not measure the program's effect on the reduction of abuse. This gap also means that the persons most likely to be able to follow through and implement program improvements are not getting the appropriate measurements which should come from the outcomes for the victims and her family—the intended beneficiaries.

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<sup>7</sup> Klein, A. (June 2001), Rhode Island Victims' Rights Needs Assessment, Cambridge, MA: BOTECA Analysis Corporation (statistics contained in report for R.I. Justice Commission based on 1999 annual report of the judiciary.)

The purpose of this research effort is to test whether outcome directed program assessments can be undertaken by oversight organizations such as state coalitions against domestic violence. The assessment question is not to settle the yes or no question of whether an intervention program is effective, but rather in what ways is the program effective and in what ways is it deficient. A primary question for this research is whether coalition staffs can develop and uses a management tool that is a useful adjunct to operating standards.

An additional result of this pilot project is information on the outcomes experienced by victims and their families, which provide insight into the difficulties of controlling domestic violence.

### **Victim Survey**

The pilot study was conducted by the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties under the direction of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It started with a sample of 226 victims whose partners were referred to a certified batterer intervention program starting in January 2002 as a result of a court disposition for an offense classified as domestic violence. The maximum follow-up period was approximately three months after program completion of the 20 week program; some offenders had not completed the program at the time of the interview. Thus the measured results are short-run effects.

The single victim interviews were begun on a part-time basis in August 2002 and ended in February 2003. Interviewees were rewarded with a \$10.00 gift certificate. The interview instrument is included in the appendix.

In January 2002, victims were sent letters from the Victim Advocacy Program of the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties. A copy of the letter is included in the appendix. Such letters are routinely sent by member organizations of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence pursuant to a contract with the Rhode Island courts to

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<sup>8</sup> 251 were incarcerated but will be on probation upon their release. Another 41 were transferred for supervision out of state and 16 were deported.

inform misdemeanor domestic violence victims of the court dispositions of their abusers. For this study, the letter was amended to include a sentence informing the victim that he or she would be contacted in six months “to see how you are doing and to ask you some questions about your experience with the system.”

Between August 2002 and February 2003, the Women’s Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties interviewed 75 of the 226 victims of domestic abuse whose partners were court ordered to attend a batterer intervention program. The primary abuse brought to the attention of the police and the courts was males abusing female intimate partners in violation of state criminal statutes. About twenty percent of the cases were non-intimate family abuse or females assailing intimate male partners. (See Table 1)

**Table 1: *The Distribution of Victims and Abusers Among the Interviewed***

Abuser						
Intimate Male	Number	Intimate Female	Number	Non-intimate Family Abuse		Number
Victim				Abuser	Victim	
Married	17	Married	1	Sister	Sister	1
Divorce/ Pending	2	Divorced/ Pending	-0-	Daughter	Mother	1
Separated	3	Separated	-0-	Son	Mother	2
Girlfriend	29	Boyfriend	3	Child	Mother	1
Ex-Girlfriend	10	Ex-boyfriend	1	Son	Father	1
				Grandson	Grandmother	1
				na	Unspecified Family Member	1
				Aunt	Nephew	1
Total	61		5			9

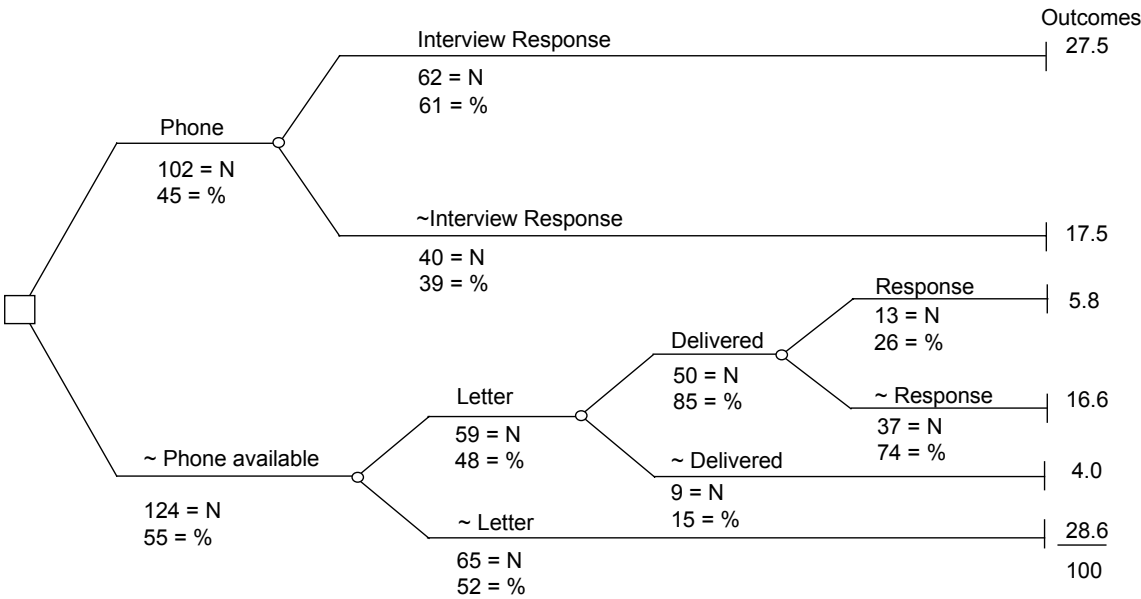
Although victims received a letter from the Women’s Resource Center that their abuser was ordered into the batterer intervention program as part of the court disposition, few received



any more information about the program except, most probably, what their abusers told them.<sup>9</sup> According to the survey, only 14 of the women interviewed, about 20 percent, were contacted by someone about the program. These contacts were most frequently made by probation officers, less so by someone from the batterer intervention program.

**The Interview Process:**

The interview process is summarized in Chart 1: *The Interview Response Process*. The primary difficulty for the survey was that because domestic violence causes disruption, about



**Chart 1: *The Interview Response Process***

55 percent of the victims’ phone numbers were disconnected. For the forty-five percent that had working phones the response rate was 61 percent. The response rate was achieved with slightly more than 3 calls per respondent. In an effort to make contact with the victims without phones a

<sup>9</sup> Rhode Island victim rights law requires the courts to inform victims of court dispositions. The court has contracted with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (and it member agencies) to notify misdemeanor victims of domestic violence. Felony victims are notified through the office of the state Attorney General.

mail questionnaire was sent. The mail questionnaire was sent to about half of the sample without phones; 26 percent of those who received the letter responded. The mailing was sent once.

The outcomes of the interview process are listed on the far right side of Chart 1. In total the response rate was 33 percent. If letters had been sent, at least once, to all the victims without phones the response rate would have been about 40 percent. If the letters had been sent multiple times and if more than 3 phone calls had been made the response rate would have been increased still further. It is clear that the process is feasible and that victims when they were contacted had a considerable interest in participating. Only two telephone contacts refused to participate.

The results of the interviews are broken down for the three categories of victims reached, female victims of male intimates, male victims of female intimates and victims of (unmarried) family members.

### **Female victims of male intimate violence**

The analysis of female victims and male intimate partner abuse is based on 61 interviewed women. Their median age was 33. The victims were about twice as likely to be unmarried as married. The length of their relationship with their assailant was about eight years; ten years for married or formerly married, and seven years for the unmarried victims. About one-half of the victims had children.

The victims indicated a long history of the abuse. Only thirty percent reported that the incident that led to the batterer intervention program participation represented the first violent incident. On the other hand, one-third reported daily to weekly violence. The remaining reported monthly or less violence. Almost three-fifths (56 percent) of the victims reported the abuse had been continuing for more than a year. Two-thirds reported that the violence was staying the same or increasing prior to the incident that resulted in the court order to attend a batterer intervention program.

Three-quarters of the victims were injured or feared that they would be injured as a result of the abuse incident that led to their abusers' arrests and program sanctions. Two-thirds of the victims called police for the incident.

Notwithstanding the batterer intervention program, twenty-eight percent of the victims were reabused within the study period. This undoubtedly understates the reabuse. Thirty percent of the victims separated from their assailants and the assailants did not recontact the victim. No attempt was made to determine if their former abusers abused subsequent victims other than the incident victims interviewed.<sup>10</sup>

The reabuse rate for the remaining victims was 40 percent during the study period. These repeat victims were less likely to call the police a second time. Forty-seven percent repeated their calls to the police, down from two-thirds the first time,<sup>11</sup> although the reabuse was significant in 70 percent of the incidents reported to the interviewers. In forty-two percent of these incidents the assailants physically tried to control the victim or threatened to hit her, threatened to throw something, or did throw something. Twenty-seven percent were physically violent to the victim or threatened her life with a knife or gun.

A further analysis of the experiences of the 61 female victims is based on a decision tree that allows an examination of the intervention program outcomes, the strategies of victims, and their apparent short-run success. A decision tree applied to the crime of battering can assist courts and coalitions make decisions about how to develop policies about batterers. Decision trees are particularly useful in defining and examining an issue, like battering, where the consequences, victim safety, are distant from the time of the intervention decision. The reader

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<sup>10</sup> We know from extensive research that abuse is often serial in nature. Deprived of one victim, abusers may go on to abuse another victim. See, e.g., Adams, s. (December 1999). Serial Batterers, Probation Research Bulletin, Boston, MA: Office of the Commissioner of Probation (25% of court-restrained men abused up to six other victims within five years); Gondolf, E. (1997). Patterns of Reassault in Batterer Programs, Violence and Victims (Men who completed batterer intervention programs in four programs who reported new partners assaulted them within 12 months.)

<sup>11</sup> The reduction in the likelihood to call the police a second time is statistically significant at 6 percent.

must keep in mind that the sample is small, that it is made up primarily of program completers, and the analysis is preliminary and explores a modest number of data dimensions.

Chart 2: *Abuse Outcomes for Victims of Offenders Sanctioned to a Batterer Intervention*

*Program* examines the reabuse of the 61 interviewed victims taking into account whether the victims had children, and whether they chose to stay with their assailant. The chart traces whether victims were married or not married (~married), whether they had children, had decided to separate or not separate (~separated) and whether they were subsequently abused. The outcomes of the percent abused and not abused (~abused) total to 100 percent. Working with the data in the chart indicates a number of salient outcomes.

1. Twenty-eight percent of all the victims had been reabused by the time of the interview; forty percent of the victims who had contact with the assailant were reabused in the study period.
2. Married and unmarried women were equally likely to be reabused.
3. Unmarried victims were more likely to leave<sup>12</sup> their abusers. Forty-four percent of married and unmarried victims quit the relationship, but fifty-six percent of unmarried victims quit, while twenty-three percent of married victims quit.<sup>13</sup>
4. Leaving an assailant may be a successful strategy for victims. During the study period the likelihood of reabuse for victims who left the abuser was 18.5 percent, 35.4 percent of victims who did not separate were reabused.<sup>14</sup>
5. The presence of children was *not* a catalyst for leaving. Forty-one percent with children quit the relationship, while forty-eight percent without children quit.<sup>15</sup>
6. Quitting the relationship with the presence of children provides protection for children. The likelihood of reabuse if there is separation with children was 8 percent; it was thirty-three percent if the relationship was maintained.<sup>16</sup>

The results indicate the seriousness and chronicity of domestic abuse. Specifically, reabuse is common, many women stay with their abusers, continuing their exposure to abuse

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<sup>12</sup> “leaving” was based on a victim’s “yes”, “no” response to Question 4 in the interview: “Are you still in contact with him?” This does not mean that the abuser has not contacted the victim, which is queried in Question 11: “Has he had any contact with you since he entered the batterer’s program?”

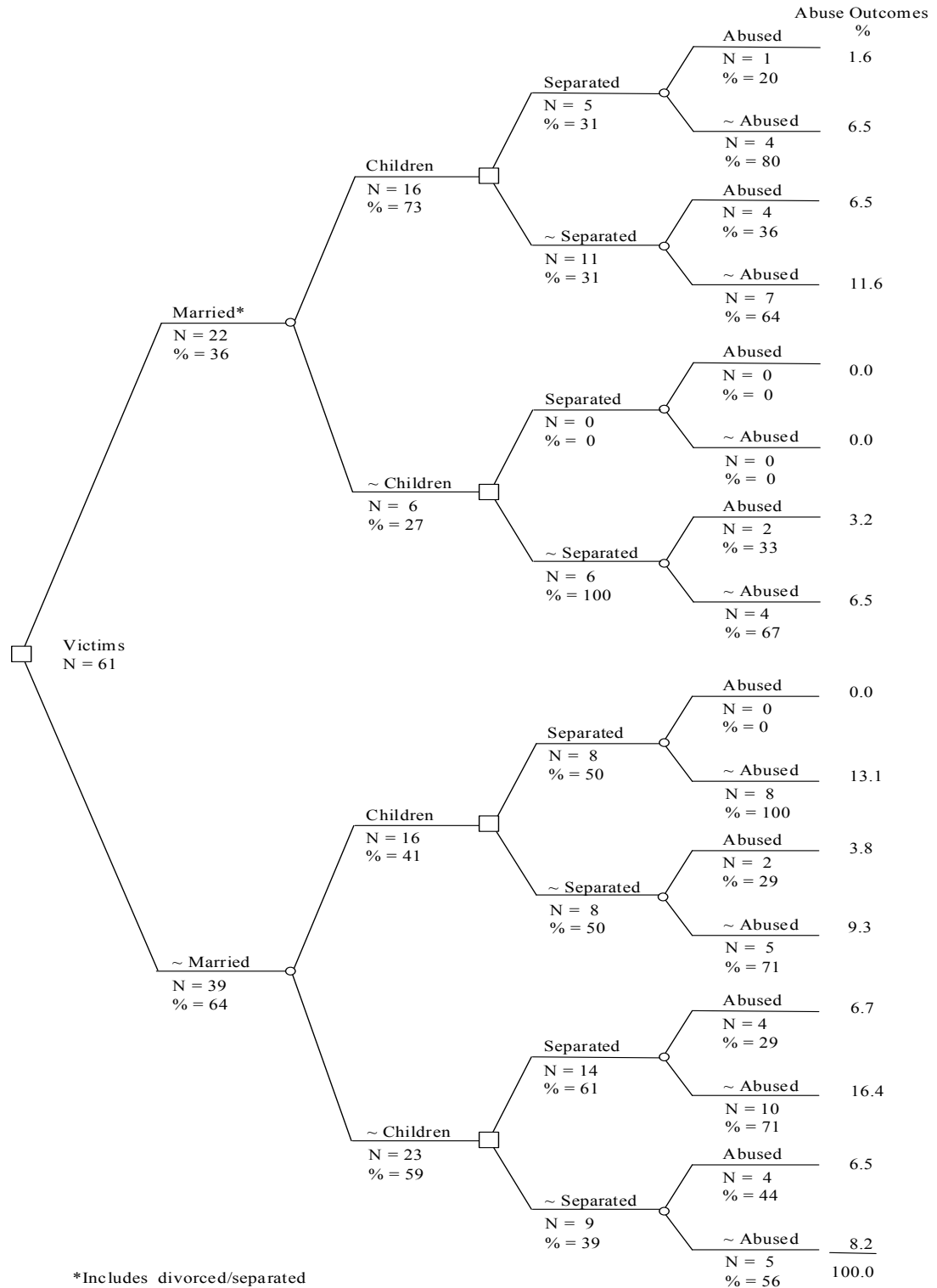
<sup>13</sup> This is statistically significant, the probability that there is no difference is only 1 percent.

<sup>14</sup> The probability that there is no difference is 7 percent.

<sup>15</sup> The difference is not statistically significant because the probability that there is no difference is high, 23 percent.

<sup>16</sup> This is statistically significant; the probability that there is no difference is 5 percent.

Chart 2: Abuse Outcomes for Victims of Offenders Sanctioned to a Batterer Intervention Program



and the presence of children does not encourage separation. If victims with children are able to separate, it provides safety for them. These results are short-run effects. The long-run effects are simply not known from this study.

### **Female victims of male abusers sentiments regarding the batterer intervention program**

Victims were asked eleven questions to elicit their sentiments regarding the batterer intervention program their abusers attended. Thirty percent of the victims had no contact with their assailant and the assailant did not recontact the victim after the court case. Of the remaining who either had not separated or were separated but were recontacted by the assailant, 64 percent considered that the abuser's behavior "changed for the better." A change for the better did not foreclose reabuse; 36 percent of those who thought there was an improvement were reabused. Fifty-seven percent of victims remaining in contact, who thought there was no change or a worsening of behavior, were reabused.<sup>17</sup> Among the reabused, about half thought there had been an improvement in behavior and approximately half thought there was no improvement or a worsening in the abusers' behavior.

Looking in more detail, about 60 percent felt their abusers made a "sincere effort to change." The same percentage reported that their abuser was better able to control his violence. However, an equal number reported that the abusers "still tried to control me, tell me what to do and be in charge of me." On the other hand, more than half felt their abusers "treated them better and with more respect."

Notwithstanding noted improvements, slightly more than half reported that their relationship with the abuser did not improve or did not change. The majority also feared repeat violence in the future or were unsure. Slightly more than a quarter of the victims agreed that the

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<sup>17</sup> The probability that there is no difference is 9 percent.

abuser “thought the whole thing was a joke.” More than twice that number, however, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

Of the 23 victims with children who answered the question, over forty percent (43 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the abuser’s “relationship with the children...improved” as a result of program participation.

### **Male victims of female abusers sentiments regarding the batterer intervention program**

There were only five male victims of female intimates interviewed. All but one of the men was a current or former boyfriend of their abusers. One was married. They reported much less prior abuse than female victims of male intimate violence with all but one reporting no prior violence (two) or less than monthly violence (two). While a third of the female victims reported daily or weekly violence, none of the males did. Half of the males reported that the prior abuse had begun more than five years earlier. Only 14 percent of the women victims of male intimates reported such long lasting abuse.

All but one of the males called the police for the incident that resulted in program placement. However, only one male victim reported injury and one reported fear of being injured.

Three out of five of the males remained with their female abusers although four expressed opinions about the effects of the program on their partners. The men were consistently split down the middle with half believing the program helped and the other half unsure or believing it made things worse. Only one still feared future violence. All but one of the men felt the program made the abuser “more respectful” and “treat them better,” although two said the abusers thought the program was a joke.

### **Non-intimate family victims' sentiments regarding the batterer intervention program**

Most of the non-intimate family victims (63 percent) separated from their abusers after the incident or by the time the interview was conducted. Most (75 percent) reported no prior violence before the incident that resulted in program placement.

All but one of the victims called police in the incident that resulted in program placement. Unlike the male victims of female intimates, three-quarters reported injuries or were afraid they would be injured during the incident.

Unlike other victims, none of the family victims reported the abuser changed for the better while in the program. All reported the abuser "did not change." None reported, however, new abuse involving police or otherwise. On the other hand, victims were split regarding the potential for future violence. Of the three who answered the question concerning future violence, two feared it and one was not sure. Two reported that the abuser thought the program a joke but two disagreed.

### **General comments expressed by victims:**

All interviewees were given an opportunity to answer one open-ended question at the end of the interview: *"What advice would you give to others whose partners or spouses are entering a batterer intervention program?"*

### **Female victims of male intimate violence comments:**

The comments broke down in several categories. The first included advice to victims to encourage program attendance. The second included advice on how the batterer intervention program could be improved. The third include advice to other victims to get out of the relationship.

#### **1. Advice to encourage program attendance:**

"Try to make sure they go. They will get good help whether they improve their behavior or not." (39 year old married woman)

"If the defendant is working hard, support him. (45 year old married woman).



“Not to feel sorry for them. Make them do it independently, on their own. Have them take responsibility for their actions. It brings awareness to situations at home. Calling 911 was the only thing that stopped the madness. (Husband) was humiliated. Not a positive experience, psychologically, he was frustrated, angry when he came home. He tried to be a better father/husband. We all grew from this.” (39 year old married woman)

“Be supportive.” (46 year old married woman)

“Advise it.” (55 year old married woman)

“Make sure they go, physically witness it.” (20 year old girlfriend)

“He was angry re: money issue, having to pay \$40 per week. Lie about your income, be honest when you’re there.” (37 year old girlfriend)

## **2. Advice on how to improve the batterer program:**

BIP should focus on psychological abuse as well as physical.” (45 year old married woman)

“Don’t think people can change. Programs should be realistic. Address anger management. The program needs more alcohol prevention. Maybe the programs should address other penalties. Maybe the couples involved shouldn’t be involved because of different personalities.” (55 year old married woman)

“Court advocates were a big help keeping me informed about the case and educating about I’m not alone in this. Really need to focus on mental abuse.” (36 year old married woman whose husband was in jail)

“People are the way they are. Batterer counseling will work for some but not most.” (32 year old married woman)

“It is worth going through the first time but don’t let it happen a second time. Batterer counseling may help first time around but second time would be a waste.” (31 year old married woman)

“Thought batterer program was not helpful. Court mandated participation with alcoholics, drug users present, could not get down to what was the root of problem. Batterer program was huge waste of money. He was working and was made to pay \$40 weekly. (Thought alcohol was catalyst for abuse, not addressed in Batterer Program. They went to private alcohol counselors for help, cost lots of money, but wouldn’t have made it without private counseling).” (32 year old girlfriend)

“Program worked for this defendant. He got a lot out of it. Our relationship improved.” (29 year old married woman)

“Too expensive. Hardships for couple’s staying together.” (43 dating cohabitant)

“Private counseling was better. We went together and were able to come to a better understanding of each other and how to interact together. Don’t expect people to change, change how you deal with the person.” (33 year old girlfriend of 15 years)

“Police, while helpful, gave incorrect info. Re: no contact order...Financial hardship occurs if abuser is money maker. Spouse/mate should have opportunity to be involved in free counseling sessions. Counseling should have included specific alcohol program, in addition to domestic counseling. This entire incident and others that have followed have not been addressed because the reason for these “melt downs” are alcohol related. I was placed in a worse situation by involving police/court/batterer program then before I called in the complaint.” (45 year old girlfriend of two years)

“Talk about the abuse. They both should get help to realize what they’re doing.” (27 year old married woman)

“If they really want it to work, they should give it a try.” (30 year old girlfriend of three years)

### **3. Advice to other victims to get out of the relationship:**

“Go down to Women’s Resource Center and ask for help.” (58 year old married woman)

“Go on and be happy.” (50 year old girlfriend)

“I do not think it is working for him. Maybe someday I hope and pray. I wish (Women’s Resource Center) was around during my 18 year marriage. I believe he has just gotten angrier (after program completed). Don’t give up! Protect yourself and your children. Don’t believe what he tells you, it is probably a lie! It’s going to hurt, but it does get better! (42 year old divorced woman still seeing ex)

“Get away as soon as you can.” (17 year old girlfriend)

“Don’t take it. Don’t deal. It is not worth it. There’s somebody out there who will treat you better.” (21 year old ex-girlfriend of four years)

“Get out of the relationship.” (33 year old ex-girlfriend)

“Harassing phone calls and driving by house spinning tires. So, I moved out of state to get away from it. I would have liked to be informed (about program), but I never was. Not to bother with it because the abuser always finds ways around the system. The abuser only does what is convenient for him and not us the victims. He hasn’t changed at all as far as I am concerned, but I know that doesn’t matter. I feel the system protects the abuser and not the victim. So as far as I am concerned a no contact order or restraining order only means an extra paper to line your bird cage with. Also I have no faith or respect for the Bristol and Warren police departments.” (38 year old married, but separated woman)

“Move away.” (44 year old ex-girlfriend)

“Break away from them before it is too late.” (18 year old girlfriend)

“If it happened once, he can change. More than that, may never change.” (19 year old ex-girlfriend of one year)

“Find out who you are getting involved with.” (34 year old girlfriend)

“Get out of situation but try to work it out if you can.” (21 year old girlfriend)

“Get out and use the system.” (38 year old separated wife)

“Not a lot of faith in system.” (42 year old wife, on-going divorce).

“Stay guarded about your situation.” (32 year old separated wife)

“Stick to your guns, don’t weaken or let them talk you out of what is going on. I can’t tell you the incredible mental/emotional detrimental effect this has had on me.” (37 year old married woman)

“Get out if he does not change with counseling.” (32 year old girlfriend of nine years)

“Don’t go back. You can’t change him.” (43 year old ex-girlfriend with child in common)

“When see any sign (of abuse) tell someone right away.” (31 year old girlfriend of 5 years)

“Stay strong.” (19 year old girlfriend)

“Not to worry about what other people think. Do what is best for you and go to court.” (20 year old separated wife)

### **Male victims of intimate female violence comments:**

(32 year old ex-boyfriend) “The system is unfair to male victims and too lenient to female defendants.”

(48 year old ex-boyfriend). “Good luck, don’t expect much.”

(48 year old fiancé) “Give violent people help but try not to affect the innocent.”

(46 year old married) “In true abuse, get out or seek therapy if it can be avoided.”

**Non-intimate victims of family violence:**

(23 year old sister) “Tell them not to go into the room angry.”

(42 year old mother) “It’s a good program.”

(52 year old family member) “It can work for some but don’t expect miracles.

**Limitations of the research**

The purpose of the project was to test the feasibility of a coalition against violence agency surveying abuse victims and gathering useful information about programs effects, victim’s personal strategies and reabuse. The project successfully demonstrated this. Multiple replications of this project would determine the consistency of the information collected across programs. The value of the data for any particular site is likely to be improved if the victims are randomly selected for interviewing and about 100 victims are interviewed. This will provide sufficient data to detect with reasonable certainty important differences, if they are present.

The most notable indicator of the non-random nature of the sample is the fact that all but two of the offenders at the time of the interview had completed the program or were still attending. A reported dropout rate of one-third in other studies is not unusual. Dropouts have a considerably higher reabuse rate than completers. Thus, the reabuse rate found in this study primarily reflects the reabuse rate of completers against the same victims, and is likely to be an understatement. The understatement could be corrected by a random sampling process and contacting new partners in addition to those who were the incident victims.

The follow-up period should also be tailored to the concerns of the Coalition, although a relatively short follow-up is likely to meet many of the Coalition’s concerns, given that program effects are not likely to grow stronger with time. A criminal record check of the abusers is also desirable to determine the community reabuse rate for assailants who separated from the victim but may be serial abusers.

The study does, however, yield some specific findings that have implications for batterer treatment in Rhode Island as well as additional research.

## **Findings and Implications for Batterer Counseling**

### **1. Forty-four percent of the female victims separated from their male abusers by the time of the interview.**

While only a quarter of the female victims reported that they were separated from their abuser at the time of the incident, by the time of the interview that percentage had increased to 44 percent. Of those who separated, 70 percent were not recontacted by their abuser.

This finding has clear implications for batterer intervention programs. State batterer intervention certification standards mandate “reasonable efforts shall be made to notify any identified victim” of “credible threats” to their safety (V.A). If programs become concerned with abusers’ risk or threats to their partners, those potential “victims” are apt to be persons other than the victims in the court cases. Therefore, it is important for programs to ascertain the names and means to contact new intimate partners of program participants. Programs or referring courts may want to consider requiring abusers to disclose any new intimate partners as a condition of participation.

### **2) A significant percentage of domestic violence victims do not remain at the address nor maintain the same phone numbers given to the police for the last domestic violence incident report.**

The high percentage of victims who leave their abusers after their abusers’ arrests and court prosecutions accounts for the difficulty reaching victims of domestic abusers after the initial arrest incident. A large percentage of victims are no longer at the phone number given to police at the time of the incident. Either they have moved or their phones have been disconnected.

The implications of these findings are that police and/or courts should secure from victims the phone numbers of third parties who are likely to know where the victims are if they subsequently leave the residences where the original police or court information was obtained. While this would certainly help researchers track down victims, the more important reason why such a measure may be desirable is that it would facilitate necessary contact by police,

prosecutors, batterer intervention program or victim service staff regarding open cases, subsequent parole or probation hearings, or warning of imminent danger based on the abuser's conduct in intervention programs, probation or parole.

**3) Batterer intervention programs serve a significant number of perpetrators of non-intimate partner abuse and female perpetrators of male intimate abusers.**

Although the majority of victims of abusers court-ordered into batterer intervention programs are females who were abused by intimate male partners, a significant minority is not. Almost 20 percent were either male victims or family member victims (excluding married or divorced couples). This reflects domestic violence arrest activity in the state. In 2001, for example, police reported 9,038 incidents of domestic violence. Of these, 5,081 or 64 percent involved female victims of male suspects. Specifically, 1,421 reports involved married or divorced couples, 4,108 present or former unmarried intimate partners (including 1,371 with child in common) and 259 dating couples. In addition, however, 396 reports involved "family members" and another 2,719 involved "cohabitants."

Further, in terms of prior and present violence, the female perpetrators of intimate violence differed significantly from their abusive male counterparts. They were significantly less violent although their victims reported their abuse had begun much earlier than what female victims reported. Male victims also reported little concern for future violence, unlike female victims of male intimates.

In contrast, family members' violence was more injurious on the whole than intimate partner violence (male or female) but either was more isolated or its victims were more prone to call police after its first manifestation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> It may also be the case that these victims and a portion of the other victims minimized or failed to accurately report prior violence. A surprisingly large number of victims, for example, reported no history of prior violence, yet received injuries and were forced to call police for the study incident that resulted in the abuser being ordered into the batterer intervention program. Yet, these same victims reported "abuse" preceded the incident by a year or more. The survey instrument may also have been at fault for not clearly defining prior violence, leaving it up to each victim to determine prior violence as opposed to the more general term "abuse."

There are two implications of the above findings for batterer intervention programs. First, it may be desirable to re-evaluate the current one-size-fits-all batterer programming for both gender intimate partner violence and non-intimate family violence treatment. Second, the lesser chronicity of female intimate violence, the less injurious results as well as reduced fear among its male victims also suggests different treatment by the programs for male versus female intimate violence.

Although male victims were divided whether or not the batterer intervention program worked to change their abuser for the better, none of the family members thought it did. Female victims of male intimate violence generally were more positive about the programs. The etiology and consequences of violence in the different relationships covered under the state's domestic violence statute may require batterer intervention programs to vary their contents accordingly.

### **3) Children were likely to be present in the abusive households.**

About half of the victims reported they had at least one child. State batterer intervention program standards specify that the curriculum for batterer programs “shall inform batterers about the impact of the abuse on children; the incompatibility of abuse with responsible parenting; and the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse (VI (A) (10)).” According to the victims, however, the batterer intervention program participation is not improving abusers relationships with their children.

The implications of this finding are that the Oversight Committee should consider expanding its curriculum mandates to include more specific material on non-abusive parenting for those abusers with children. Bancroft and Silverman (2002),<sup>19</sup> recommend, for example:

The curriculum of each batterer program should include (a) education on appropriate parenting, including the distinction between permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting styles; (b) education on the

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<sup>19</sup> Bancroft, L. & Silverman, J. (2002). The batterer as parent: Addressing the impact of domestic violence on family dynamics, Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage, pp. 209-210.

effects on children exposure to domestic violence; (c) identification and confrontation of behaviors that undermine the mother's parenting authority or that damage her relationship with her children; (d) identification and confrontation of behaviors that involve using the children as weapons against the mother; and (e) education on the effects of child sexual abuse and the proper respecting of children's boundaries.

In addition, they advise that programs should contact any current or past partners of the batterer with whom he has children to inquire about his conduct as a parent and to find out whether he is engaged in litigation regarding custody or visitation. The programs should develop linkages with programs for children exposed to domestic violence and be prepared to advocate for the protective needs of children.

**4) Re-abuse rates based on new arrests and victim reports were consistent with those found in studies across the country.**

Eight of the male abusers were arrested for new abuse by the time of the interview. This represented a re-arrest rate for male abusers of 13 percent within a year or less of being sentenced for domestic violence. (The arrest rate is 19 percent if it excludes victims who were no longer in contact with their abuser.) This finding is consistent with other studies that measure re-abuse based on arrest records.<sup>20</sup>

Based on direct victim reports, however, 40 percent of the males in contact with their victims physically re-abused their victims. The non-arrest re-abuse included threats to inflict injury as well as physical assaults (kicking, hitting, shoving, pushing, or restraining) or attempted assaults (throwing objects at the victim). This is also consistent with other research that almost uniformly document higher victim reported abuse than police reported incidents of abuse. In a study of batterer intervention programs in Broward County Florida, for example, while the arrest rate for reabuse was 4.8 percent, 46% of the victims reported new assaults

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<sup>20</sup> The Appendix includes a chart summarizing batterer intervention program re-abuse rates as measured by arrest records.

within one year. Similarly, a study of four programs in three states documented a 5% re-arrest rate, but victims reported a 28% re-assault rate by the same program completers.<sup>21</sup>

Re-arrests were not confirmed with actual record checks. Victims reported only arrests and new incidents that involved them. These numbers do not include cases where abusers may have abused and/or been arrested for abusing another victim outside the study. They also do not include general recidivism, arrests for non-domestic-related crimes.<sup>22</sup>

**5) The abusers who did not attend the program as ordered were re-arrested for new abuse according to their victims.**

Although only two batterers did not complete the batterer intervention program as ordered according to their victims, both were arrested for re-abuse. While this sample of non-compliant abusers is tiny, it is consistent with other studies that consistently document much higher re-arrest rates for non-completers than program completers.<sup>23</sup>

The effect of batterer intervention programs cannot be determined by comparing re-arrests among program completers and non-completers. The same characteristics that make abusers non-completers may cause them to re-abuse. Therefore we would expect non-completers to be disproportionately re-abusers. Studies of attrition in batterer intervention programs suggest that program completers are more likely to be employed, married, have children, be more educated, perceive the program as important, and to admit violence at intake. They also are less likely to have criminal records and substance abuse problems.<sup>24</sup>

The different risks presented by batterer intervention completers and non-completers have important implications for both programs and the courts. In order to protect victims from

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<sup>21</sup> Idem; Gondolf, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> The victim survey study cannot address program efficacy in Rhode Island in regard to cessation of violence. It can only suggest that the reported rates fall within that found in abuser-focused studies utilizing official records and victim reports. A larger Rhode Island victim-based study involving significant number of batterers referred to different programs could, however, discern any variation in treatment effects among different programs that exist across the state.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix for a summary of batterer intervention program studies comparing program completers and non-completers re-abuse rates.



further abuse, non-completers must be identified and returned to court quickly so that courts may take immediate and appropriate action to protect victims before the abusers are allowed to re-offend. In this study, one of the two non-completers not only was arrested for re-abusing his victim again, *he was arrested two more times*. According to the victim, the only actions the court took was to re-enroll the abuser into the program and order “no contact” with the victim!

The minimal non-completion rate in this study was due to the nonrandom sample. Most programs report much higher non-completion rates. In the Broward County, Florida study of probationers mandated to attend batterer programs, for example, 25 percent did not complete the program, having been terminated for too many absences or other non-complaint behavior.<sup>25</sup> In a study of six programs in Pennsylvania, similarly, researchers documented non-completion rates from 25 percent in Centre County to 38 percent in York County.<sup>26</sup>

#### **6) More female victims expressed enthusiasm for the program than not.**

Not surprisingly, those who felt their abusers sincerely attempted to change their behavior were more positive than those who did not. Consequently, victim responses largely tracked re-abuse rates. Those who reported that the abuser thought it was a “joke” also reported that the program did not change the abusers for the better.

This finding has several implications for batterer intervention programs. First, after an initial orientation period, programs may want to distinguish between abusers who are simply attending the program to comply with their court order as opposed to those sincerely “working the program.” It may not prove helpful to maintain the latter in the programs in hope that they will somehow “absorb” good information nonetheless. Attendance should be in substance, not simply form.

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<sup>24</sup> Daly, J. & Pelowski, S. (2000). Predictors of dropout among men who batter: A review of studies with implications for research and practice. *Violence and Victims*, 15, pp. 137-160.

<sup>25</sup> Feder, *Op. Cit.* 12.

<sup>26</sup> Klein, A. & Wilson, D. (June 2002). *The Implementation of Batterer Intervention Services Six Pennsylvania Sites*, Waltham, MA: BOTEK Analysis Corporation (Prepared for Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency).

Second, if the mega-analysis reflects batterer intervention programs in general, including those certified in Rhode Island, we must look for rationales for these programs other than violence cessation alone. Among other things, we should examine their impact on victims and the well-being of the abusers' families.

Notwithstanding the re-abuse reported by victims by the time of the interview, the programs did not instill confidence in the majority of victims that they would be free from violence in the future. Most were either unsure or sure that there would be violence again. This suggests that the programs alone, although they are perceived as helping abusers, are not enough to free victims from fear. In addition, while the programs may help abusers, a little over half of the victims are either unsure or sure that the programs have not improved their relationship with the abuser. In addition, of the 23 victims with children who answered the question, over forty percent (43 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the abuser's "relationship with the children ... improved" as a result of program participation.

To the extent that batterer programs influence women to remain with their abusers in the hope or expectation that their relationship and family life will improve, victims will be disappointed. While state certification standards require programs to present victims with a disclaimer that program participation will stop the abuse (V (A) (2)), officials may want to consider a disclaimer that program completion will improve relationships within the family. While courts and programs are appropriately concerned with violence cessation, studies indicate for most victims the non-physical abuse often proves harder to bear and is as destructive or damaging to the victim and her family than the periodic physical assaults.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Jacobson, N. & Gottman, J. (1998). When men batter women. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

**7) With effort, most victims can be reached to obtain batterer intervention program feedback.**

One purpose of the pilot study was to test the ability of victim service agency personnel to contact and effectively conduct complex phone interviews to gather information about victim outcomes of batterer intervention programs (BIP). It is necessary to test the feasibility of this process if this method of quality control is to become a routine part of the operation of a victim service agency. Over time the agencies will be able to develop, administrative techniques for random sampling, standard questionnaires that afford cross program comparisons, standardize interviewer training processes, make good estimates on when best to place calls, learn to track the location of victims or change the original information collected about the victim so that they can be more easily contacted by phone or by mail.

Continued efforts at tracking, telephoning at strategic times, and sending mail questionnaires are very likely to increase the response rate. For example, if increased phone attempts contacted 80 percent of those with working phones and repeat mailings resulted in complete questionnaires from 50 percent of those with good mailing addresses, the total response rate would have been 60 percent.

**Conclusion:**

Given the sample size of this study, all of the above findings and recommendations must be tentative pending a more substantial study. However, these preliminary results suggest the efficacy of institutionalizing victim feedback for batterer counseling programs to ensure programs better realize their overriding goal of victim safety in its broadest sense. The insights provided by victims should inform program standards, content, enforcement and utilization.

## Appendices

1. Completers and Non-Completers Re-Abuse Rates
2. Re-abuse Rates in Studies of Court-referred Abusers
3. Letter sent by Victim Advocacy Program to Victims
4. Interview instrument sample

Appendix 1: *Completers and Non-Completers Re-Abuse Rates*

Study	Completers	Non-Completers	Percent Non-Completer Re-Abuse Greater
Dutton, D., Bodnarchik, M., Kropp, R., Hart, S., & Ogloff, J., 1997 <sup>28</sup>	23% (official records)	50% (official records)	217%
Edleson, J. & Grusznski, R., 1988 <sup>29</sup>	33% (victim reports)	46% (victim reports)	139%
Hamberger, K. & Hastings, J., 1989 <sup>30</sup>	28% (victim & official reports)	47% (victim & official reports)	168%
Shupe, A., Stacey, W., & Hazelwood, L., 1987 <sup>31</sup>	16% (victim report)	45% (victim report)	281%
Dutton, D., 1986 <sup>32</sup>	4% (official reports)	40% (official reports)	1000%
Gondolf, E., 1998 <sup>33</sup>	5% (arrests)	20% (arrests)	400%
Chen, H., Bersani, C., Myers, S., & Denton, R., 1989 <sup>34</sup>	5% (arrests)	10% (arrests)	200%
Dobash, R., Dobash, R., Cavanagh, K. & Lewis, R., 1996 <sup>35</sup>	7% (conviction)	10% (conviction)	142%
Babcock, J. & Steiner, R., 1999 <sup>36</sup>	8%	23%	287.5%

<sup>28</sup> Wife assault treatment and criminal recidivism: An 11 year follow-up. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 41 (1), pp. 9-23.

<sup>29</sup> The effects of group treatment for men who batter: An 18 month follow-up study. Research on Social Work Practice, 1 (3), pp. 227-243.

<sup>30</sup> Counseling male spouse abusers: Characteristics of treatment completers and dropouts. Violence and Victims, 4(1), pp. 275-286.

<sup>31</sup> Violent men, violent couples. Boston, MA: DC Heath & Co.

<sup>32</sup> The outcome of court-mandated treatment for wife assault: A quasi-experimental evaluation. Violence and Victims, 1 (3), pp. 163-175.

<sup>33</sup> Gondolf, E. (1998). Do batterer programs work? A 15 month follow-up of multi site evaluation. Domestic Violence Report, 3(5), pp. 65-80.

<sup>34</sup> Evaluating the effectiveness of a court sponsored treatment program. Journal of Family Violence, 4(4), pp. 309-322.

<sup>35</sup> Re-education programmes for violent men-an evaluation. Research Findings, 46, pp. 1-4.

<sup>36</sup> The relationship between treatment, incarceration and recidivism of battering: A program evaluation of Seattle's coordinated community response to domestic violence. Journal of Family Psychology, 1, pp. 46-59.

## Appendix 2: *Re-abuse Rates in Studies of Court-referred Abusers*

Study	Sample Size	Re-abuse	Percent Re-Abuse
Babcock, J. & Steiner, R., 1999 <sup>37</sup>	339	Police records Over two years	8%
Dobash, R., Dobash, R., Cavanagh, K. & Lewis, R., 1996 <sup>38</sup>	932	Conviction for dv offense with same victim over 12 months	7%
Dutton, D., Bodnarchik, M., Kropp, R., Hart, S., & Ogloff, J., 1997 <sup>39</sup>	518	Police arrests for assaults on women Over 4 months to 11 years	23%
Shupe, A., Stacey, W., & Hazelwood, L., 1987 <sup>40</sup>	102	Self and victim reports	16%
Syers, M., & Edelson, J., 1992 <sup>41</sup>	358	Victim and police	43%
Chen, H., Bersani, C., Myers, S., & Denton, R., 1989 <sup>42</sup>	221	Police Over four months	5%
Dutton, D., 1986 <sup>43</sup>	100	Police report of assaults over 6 months to 3 years	4%
Gondolf, E., 1998 <sup>44</sup>	840	Police report of assaults over 15 months	5%
Harrell, A., 1991 <sup>45</sup>	348	New dv charges over 29 months	19%
Feder, L. & Forde, D., 2000 <sup>46</sup>	227	Dv arrest over one year	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,985</b>		<b>12.9%</b>

<sup>37</sup> The relationship between treatment, incarceration and recidivism of battering: A program evaluation of Seattle's coordinated community response to domestic violence. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 1, pp. 46-59.

<sup>38</sup> Re-education programmes for violent men-an evaluation. *Research Findings*, 46, pp. 1-4.

<sup>39</sup> Wife assault treatment and criminal recidivism: An 11 year follow-up. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 41 (1), pp. 9-23.

<sup>40</sup> *Violent men, violent couples*. Boston, MA: DC Heath & Co.

<sup>41</sup> The combined effects of coordinated criminal justice intervention in woman abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 7(4), pp. 490-502.

<sup>42</sup> Evaluating the effectiveness of a court sponsored treatment program. *Journal of Family Violence*, 4(4), pp. 309-322.

<sup>43</sup> The outcome of court-mandated treatment for wife assault: A quasi-experimental evaluation. *Violence and Victims*, 1 (3), pp. 163-175.

<sup>44</sup> Gondolf, E. (1998). Do batterer programs work? A 15 month follow-up of multi site evaluation. *Domestic Violence Report*, 3(5), pp. 65-80.

<sup>45</sup> *Evaluation of court-ordered treatment for domestic violence offenders: Final report*. Washington DC: Institute for Social Analysis.

<sup>46</sup> Feder, L. & Forde, D. (June 20, 2000). *A Test of the Efficacy of Court-Mandated Counseling for Domestic Violence Offenders: The Broward Experiment*. Memphis, TN: University of Memphis.

